

rural veterans access to the care they need in their communities. Before he became VA Secretary, I had the opportunity to join Dr. David Shulkin on a visit to both the Caribou CBOC and Cary Medical Center, where he praised the innovative work being done being done to provide veterans with top quality healthcare close to where they live. Veterans in Aroostook County and throughout America are grateful for Cary's leadership.

Our State has long history as a leader in working to expand and improve veterans' access to quality healthcare. One year ago, we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the very first national hospital for veterans: Togus, in Maine, which opened its doors in November of 1866. In 2014, we celebrated the opening of the women's clinic at Togus in recognition of the fact that more and more women serve our country in uniform.

I am determined to continue those early efforts on behalf of our rural veterans. The recent enactment of the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act of 2017, which I cosponsored with my Maine colleague Senator ANGUS KING, is an important step toward keeping this obligation to our veterans, both urban and rural. As well as providing additional funding for healthcare access in the community, the legislation authorizes 28 leases for VA facilities across the country, including a much-needed CBOC in Portland. The result of this crucial legislation is increased access to quality care for all who have defended our freedom.

Maine is home to more than 125,000 veterans. To put that in perspective, Maine has more veterans per capita than all but two of the other States in the country. We are proud of our State's contributions to protecting our Nation and of Maine's impressive record in caring for our veterans.

President Abraham Lincoln signed the legislation establishing a national network of hospitals for Civil War veterans on March 3, 1865. The very next day, he concluded his second inaugural address with a commitment "to bind up our nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle. . . ."

We must uphold that commitment. Our veterans have sacrificed so much for our country. We owe them all that we can do to ensure they receive the best care possible. The veterans and grateful citizens who fought for the Caribou CBOC knew that, and, on this 30th anniversary, we honor their dedication by carrying on their work.

#### TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT GENERAL FREDRICK B. "BEN" HODGES

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, today I wish to pay tribute to a great leader and an exceptional Army officer, LTG Frederick B. "Ben" Hodges who is currently serving as the commanding general of U.S. Army Europe in Wiesbaden, Germany, as he prepares for his transition and retirement from Active Duty.

LTG Ben Hodges has served our Army and our Nation for more than 35 years. He has been a true professional and a dedicated soldier, leader, and officer. Throughout his career, he has commanded our great soldiers at many levels, he has deployed to combat numerous times in defense of the Nation, and he has been assigned the most critical positions in our Army. Lieutenant General Hodges continues to provide outstanding leadership, advice, and sound professional judgment on numerous critical issues of enduring importance to the Army, Congress, and this Nation.

A native of Quincy, FL, Lieutenant General Hodges graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in May 1980 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant of infantry. After his first assignment in an infantry unit in Germany, he commanded infantry units at the company, battalion, and brigade levels in the 101st Airborne Division and in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom during the initial invasion of Iraq as Bastogne 6, leading the 327th Infantry Regiment.

Throughout his magnificent career, Lieutenant General Hodges has served in a variety of important positions within the U.S. Army, proving over and over again his exceptional leadership and staff skills. These positions include service as a tactics Instructor at the Infantry school, aide-de-camp to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and service as both the deputy chief and then chief of legislative, liaison for the U.S. Army in Washington, D.C.

Lieutenant General Hodges' assignments as a general officer include deputy commander for stability, Regional Command-South, International Security Assistance Force supporting Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan from August 2009 until October 2010. Before arriving in Germany, Lieutenant General Hodges also held a leadership position at NATO, serving as the first commander of Allied Land Command, Izmir, Turkey, from November 2012 to October 2014.

For the past 3 years, Lieutenant General Hodges has been the commanding general of United States U.S. Army Europe. During this period of extraordinary change and challenge in Europe's security environment, Lieutenant General Hodges has improved relationships with NATO allies and European partners. Through his leadership, Lieutenant General Hodges has successfully led his command through some of the most complex issues our Army has faced in recent years with unparalleled results. While increasing the transparency of Army operations within Europe, Lieutenant General Hodges has led his command through the rapid growth in the frequency and complexity of multinational training exercises, thus increasing interoperability and strengthening NATO's commitment to deter potential aggression. The foundations set by Lieutenant General Hodges will allow NATO and

our Army to meet every mission requirement in Europe.

On behalf of Congress and the United States of America, I thank LTG Ben Hodges, his wife, Holly, and their entire family for their continued commitment, sacrifice, and contribution to this great Nation. I join my colleagues in wishing him future success in all aspects of life and I am sure that many soldiers will continue to emulate him as a role model for service, sacrifice, and leadership.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### REMEMBERING PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

• Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, today I am proud to stand to honor Phyllis Schlafly, a woman who was not only an incredible Missourian, but an incredible American. She was a strong conservative, engaged citizen, proud wife and mother, powerful speaker, passionate lawyer, devout Catholic, and good friend of mine. We lost her a year ago, and I take this moment today to pay tribute to her and the impact she had on our Nation.

There is no doubt that the name Phyllis Schlafly will be mentioned in the history of conservatism.

Upon Phyllis's receiving of the Women of Achievement Award in 1963, publisher of St. Louis Globe-Democrat Richard Amberg stated that "Phyllis Schlafly stands for everything that has made America great and for those things which will keep it that way."

Our late President, Ronald Reagan, said to Phyllis Schlafly, "Eagle Forum has set a high standard of volunteer participation in the political and legislative process. . . . You've been out front on so many of the most important issues of our time. . . . Your work is an example to all those who would struggle for an America that is prosperous and free. . . . Our nation needs the kind of dedicated individual volunteer service you and Eagle Forum have demonstrated over the last 20 years."

Phyllis was born and raised in St. Louis, MO. She attended college at Washington University and received her master of arts degree at Radcliffe College. She married John Fred Schlafly, Jr., in 1949 and had six children. In 1972, Phyllis established Eagle Forum, and her work to strengthen conservative principles flourished from there. Her voice became the conservative conscience of the GOP, and she was never afraid to let me or any other member of the Republican Party know when she felt we were not true to those ideals.

While I wish today to commemorate her upon the anniversary of her death, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that her passing did not end her life's work.

Her legacy of strong conservative values continues today through organizations, books, and through the passion